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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by discussing the difference between genre and gender, defining the former as the study of a systemic totality, and the latter as the split in the totality, reversal, upturning, and break-up of any systemic logic. Also discussed are (1) the difference between nature and culture, and the quarrel between essentialist and anti-essentialist feminism in the context of women and television soap opera; (2) the double standard referring to gender and existing within popular culture, not less than in high culture, which is partly focused on how women's work is ignored or forgotten, even within popular culture criticism; (3) the relationship of genre and gender within literary studies, cinema, and television criticism, including several illustrative examples of popular television series; (4) the feminine narrative, especially in terms of soap operas and telenovelas; (5) the feminine continuum; and (6) Italian soap operas and the changing structure of televisions soaps and crime shows in general. (CGD)

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LIDIA CURTI

GENRE AND GENDER

(Paper presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conference)

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GENRE AND GENDER

Lidia Curti

...au temps de la toute puissance de la television...

Jean-Luc Godard

No medium outside TV is quite so beset with scholarly analysis based solely on its lowest achievements. Ever read a Leavisite purge of Zane Grey? No. So just what is it on TV that so attract the tracts?...In the Career Person Eighties, bookshelves on the Left creak under countless analyses of Dallas, Crossroads, etc. NEW IMPROVED SEMIOLOGICAL ARIELSI.

Ian Penman, "The fog that is Fallon", The Face, April 1986

1. 'D' for difference

Between genre and gender there is only the difference of a 'd'. According to the OED the 'd' is excrescent, the two words have the same origin (from Greek to Latin to Old French), and one root en = to produce. It is a word with multiple meanings, each of them referring to the common characters uniting a word, to the constants, and at the same time to the distinctions between one category and another. We know that the definition of genre refers to the common characters of a whole but the whole is also defined in relation to other genres, to the difference. "...genres are instances of repetition and difference" (Neale 1980, p. 48). Whereas gender refers to "each of the 3 (or 2) grammatical kinds corresponding more or less to distinctions of sex (or absence of sex)" (SOED, 2), it first recalls the difference, and only within the difference it then recognizes wholes.

The 'd' is the difference between my two words, is the intractable difference within a thinking of totalities. Genre, the study of a systemic totality; gender the split in the totality, reversal, upturning, the break-up of any systemic logic ("...the way in which, within discourse, the feminine is determined as lack, fault, or mime and 'inverted' reproduction of the subject, should mean that an excess, an upturning of that logic can come from the feminine", Irigaray 1977, p. 64). "D" is always there in presence/absence, indicating the imperfect closure between genre and gender, and within each of the two: the boundaries between genders constantly redefined through the endless play of repetition and difference, the boundary masculine/feminine forever open and constantly deferred. Also because the reader/viewer is the essential final link for the constitution both of genre ("an agreed code between film-maker and audience" - McArthur 1972, p. 20) and of gender.

2. Nature or Culture?

Pursuing the linguistic angle and risking to arise K.K. Ruthven's anger once more (1), I want to refer again to the common root of the two words, by recalling that in Italian and French there is only one word ('genre' and 'genre') for the two concepts; it would therefore be necessary to use qualifications in order to give a meaningful title to this piece. In Italian it would be nearly unavoidable to say 'Generi narrativi e differenza sessuale', which might be a shock to the authors of Key Concepts in Communication who define gender as "the cultural differentiation of male from female" (O'Sullivan, T. et al, p. 98). Whenever sex becomes meaningful, it becomes gender, according to a firm anti-essentialist attitude (2).

Genre on the other hand is seen as existing only in the realm of the formal, there is nothing natural about it ever, it is a signifying paradigm. So if the natural aspects of gender are defined - "its source in nature is neither here nor

there" (ibid.) - we are again in front of a signifying paradigm, happening only in language, in culture.

If we move to the much debated question of women and soap opera, which of the two paradigms should we assume? Are women in front of television only social subjects then? Have they entered language and the symbolical order or are they just natural beings? Insofar as they reply to the formal conventions of tv languages they are social and cultural subjects but this subjectivity is one that exists very closely to natural paradigms: the crossing of the two moments is what places their reaction to tv narrativity in a specific niche within the general tv audience.

The quarrel between essentialist and anti-essentialist feminism could be displaced by observing that the difference between nature and culture is another essentialist argument who can say where the one ends and the other begins, and how could we assume that the same boundaries between the two are the same from one culture to another?

In refusing to accept this crude dichotomy within feminist criticism, I would like to underline that if there are risks in essentialism there are maybe greater dangers in overstating anti-essentialism, at the risk of creating "the greatest inhibition to work in cultural theory and politics at the moment" as an American feminist critic has put it (Russo 1985, p. 12).

3. 'D' for double or a double 'double standard'

The diffusion of women's writing in TV criticism has given rise to some reflections on the double standard existing within popular culture, not less than in high culture, a double standard referring to gender. The debate was partly focussed on how women's work is ignored or forgotten even within popular culture criticism.

It has been noted that the negative judgments about female popular narrative

has come from female critics even more markedly than from men: "...the criticism written by women has long been in the habit of denigrating what George Eliot called 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' (Modleski 1982, p. 13), and the tones assumed by women ("dismissiveness; hostility - tending unfortunately to be aimed at the consumers of the narratives; or, most frequently, a flippant kind of mocker" - ibid, p. 14) are not very different from those of men, internalizing as they do "the masculine contempt for sentimental (feminine) drivel."

It is clear that the discrimination has many fronts: the first and classical one is relation to women's role in popular culture that is too often forgotten (in the study of subcultures, for instance, which did not acquire the adjective 'male' for a long time and that happened in a flurry, nearly overnight, all over the world). More frequently, the discrimination refers to the 'quality' of women's presence, the particular inflection it acquires as a further debasing element within popular culture.

The double standard does not only apply to a question of 'value', but also to the ways in which feminine narrative is discussed, mainly with an eye to contents alone. And even if such narrative is neither forgotten nor despised nor discussed for what it is about, it often gets a label whether it falls within high culture (Charlotte Bronte is always a female novelist, Charles Dickens is hardly ever remembered for being male), or within popular culture. In the latter case it gets the dismissive label of 'women matters' or 'sentimental rubbish'.

This is particularly true if we look at the attitude of the press towards TV popular narratives, those that attract the majority of the viewers and yet are never previewed by the critics and hardly ever reviewed except in derisive terms. This attitude extends to all kinds of serial tales but the fact is that those usually associated with women, the large enclave of soap opera, has a very large part in it.

The apocalyptic view on popular culture by no chance collapses together the popular and the feminine. Both lend themselves rather easily and (why not) willingly to mocking, as one can see in the amusing but sneering comments of Nancy-Banks Smith in The Guardian and Ian Penman in The Face, just to name two among the few interesting and interested critics, on the wide shoulders of the notorious Dynasty women. A sense of humour is never to be despised but what about having some in high culture too?

It is interesting to note that one of the new priests of the new massified world is invoked by I. Penman. Jean Baudrillard's vision of the American universe, 'thoroughly rotten with wealth, with power, with senility, with indifference, with mental hygiene, with technological vanity and useless violence' shows some continuity in double standards going over from modernism into post-modernism.

Finally, the invisibility of women's criticism on popular culture has been noted. This may also be due to the fact that women themselves, and feminists in particular, only recently got interested in and accepted popular culture. For a long time there has been deep suspicion of the exploitative character of commercial and mass culture in relation to women. The positioning of woman has too often been as privileged objects and hardly ever subjects within the popular, but this worry has sometime fed into a continuation of the old attitude of contempt or neglect.

Even today, very interesting studies of this area are somewhat marred or at least limited in scope by this moralistic outlook. Words like pleasure, desire, needs have found their way into the critical vocabulary but there is little critical discourse directly addressing women's pleasures, desires, needs rather than what is hidden behind it, or their instrumental pitfalls.

All this shows that there are difficulties in the task that women critics

have wanted to assign to themselves - not only out of necessity (a necessary positive discrimination) but also out of pleasure - not least that of creating a new specialized ghetto for female criticism in what is termed women's popular narrative. It is certainly better than the old black hole, but the spectre of a double standard is still roaming about. Women usually speak of women, or if they don't they never forget the gender relevance. Conversely most male critics are still engaged in a neutral criticism on what is considered neutral subject matter; when they venture on matters of gender they automatically mean female. It still holds true to some extent that 'male stuff' has a right to be considered neutral or at least bisexual, whereas the feminine stands as such unalloyed.

4. A complex definition

The relation between genre and gender has been usefully established and discussed, to the point of boredom according to some (cfr.Ruthven 1984, p.115), within literary studies. Such an inflation probably refers to the link normally made between women and the novel, or fiction in general, and mostly from the point of view of authorship. At the level of the popular, authorship is quite invariably extended to the consideration of women as audience, as one of the major determinations in the rise of popular culture has been seen in the access of women to the institutions of work and leisure, and thus to literacy and readership, during the last century.

In spite of this in most of the classical works that give general definitions of genre there is hardly any mention of gender. From the formalists to the structuralists, from Frye to Todorov, the topology of genres, mainly observed in its textual specificity, is considered and that happens only rarely, it is usually with reference to social status.

It is in the area of studies on genre within cinema and television criticism that more specific attention has been given to the problem of gender, both as a textual determinant and as an aspect of the audience, mostly by women writing on the so called `gynocentric' genres (3).

In this field the body of work is excellent and impressive and runs into a long list. There is a wide choice within English and especially American criticism whereas I found scarce material within my own culture and that rarely aimed at television, except maybe in the cultural pages of some newspapers such as Il Manifesto and Reporter (4).

There are multiple possibilities for the definition of a male or a female genre: the criterion may be based on text (format, subject matter, editing,

distance of the camera, varying angle, colour, acting, and all the other elements of verbal and visual discourse), and/or context (time and slot, conditions of production, institutional setting, and mostly viewing). It is normally based on a mixture of both. In spite and maybe because of such multifarious reference points, it has hardly ever found an obvious or clear-cut definition (cfr. Neale 1980, p. 59).

Pure mono-gendered narratives do not seem to exist: even when there are recognizable male series such as the crime series, there will always be an exception, that will immediately deconstruct and redefine the genre as a whole. Even within the same series, there are moments and phases that constitute a rupture or inversion of its main features produced by changes in production, acting, directing, camera work, writing, etc.

Hill Street Blues is a good example of this though being a predominantly male series, it has had a few moments when the emergence of female characters (in turn Joyce with her resistance to marriage, Fay in her `feminist' phase, Lucy with her maternal instinct on one side and the problems of becoming the boss in a male environment on the other) has, however slightly, altered the quite powerful all male feeling of the series.

It is interesting to note, however, that the main element of success in the series, alongside the fragmentary style of camera work, is the particular male pathos dominating the series. This pathos comes out in the multi-faceted relations between the men working in the district (and sometimes with men outside, as is the case of Mick and some of his youthful admirers), all summarized in the relation of each of them with the father/boss. The main icon of the series is the seriously concerned face of Furillo in alternate shots with that of one or two of the `children': a recurring close shot in a crowd of long shots encompassing many planes and levels and moving figures. It is surprising

that what has been defined as the first progressive police series is also one that works most seriously and determinedly on the construction of a male ethos. Its careful delineation of atmosphere involves a subtle `feeling' rather than the quick bursts of activity and subsequent violence that characterizes the male ethos of other crime series. If, following Ian Ang's work on Dallas, I should define its structure of feeling, I would call it `a sentimental maleness'.

This suggests that Hill Street Blues is not so much a further reaffirmation of the police series as a male genre, but that it also involves a distinctly softer edge and that to some extent it witnesses a certain feminization of a male paradigm. I must add that I, as one of the many women who like the series, find in this explanation of my pleasure a political comfort (it is not always possible to find political support for one's own likings of popular narrative). This probably is the reason why it is a minority programme (it certainly still is in Italy and G.B.), and why this minority likes it.

Even when the male style is unfaltering, the viewing figures tell us that it is watched by women nearly as much as by men, and sometimes more. This also applies the other way round for soap opera which once seemed to offer such a clear cut case for the attribution of gender in its audience.

Charlotte Brunsdon starts her essay on Crossways declaring: "The audience for soap opera is usually assumed to be female" (1981,p.32) and Dorothy Hobson in her book on the same series proves the hypothesis she had commenced with, that the series was for women. She concludes: "Soap operas are specifically aimed to appeal to women, although women are not their only viewers." (Hobson 1982, p.169). This is an initial warning that prompts us to look again at the viewing figures; here we discover that though women usually represent the majority of viewers, men are not too far behind and in some cases more numerous (5).

Apart from viewing figures, that often give tiny oscillations between

male/female and that should always be read with all the other determinations in mind, we shall discover that there are many distinctions to be made, between prime time and day time, between American and English. And among different moments and phases within each of these.

There have been internal changes and developments that have changed or altered the relation between sexual identity and a genre, sometime of the same kind. The original definitions and subsequent changes can be seen in the movement from Coronation Street to Brookside and Eastenders; from General Hospital and The Guiding Light to Dallas and Dynasty; from Starsky and Hutch to Cagney and Lacey; from Colombo to Kojak to Juliet Bravo and The Gentle Touch; from The Sweeney and Gangsters to Widows.

In some of these cases there has been the extension of the formula to women, as in the crime series; in others, more interestingly perhaps, there has been men's 'entry into fields normally considered a female ghetto, and previously often with some contempt.

This applies as much to styles and subject matter as to viewers. We have gradually seen the emergence both in Brookside and above all Eastenders of interesting male characters: Den the adulterous husband ready to be put in the uncomplicated role of the villain has become an articulated man with good and understandable motives. He is torn between two sets of loyalties and affections and can be quite convincing about it. On the other hand there has been the adoption of a fragmentary structure that was already typical of the telenovelas; the fact that in British productions this is all done with great skill and with what I see as a very interesting intermingling of high and popular techniques does not alter the fact that this is increasingly becoming a characteristic of editing right across the genre.

I have given this example because it is an interesting change of what I

could call the political climate in soap opera, but of course an even greater change happened long ago when the genre moved to prime time in the States. It is sufficient to think of the centrality of a male character like J.R., or the `good guy' Bobby, to know that Dallas is not an all-women show.

As far as viewing goes, I have already mentioned that viewing figures, whenever they give differentiated profiles, indicate that men are watching soaps as well. But this does not only apply to the more sophisticated versions of soap, nor is it restricted to a special section of the male audience as my former example implied. It is within a popular audience that the change is happening most interestingly and on a wider scale. The increase of a male audience for soap opera may be tied to the spread of unemployment giving men more time at home, or to the diffusion of narrativity in our era. In Italy the case of people rushing home to see the daily installment of The Guiding Light or Capitol is quite noticeable and has to some extent modified the rhythms of life in the popular area in the centre of Naples where I live. It certainly involves men as much as women.

Is it the usual appropriation of the kind "I want to be there as well"? Is the faci(shio)nation with things feminine? Is it simply a question of an extension of the market? This last hypothesis, simplistic even in the case of women detectives, is even more so for what seems a complex `ideological' movement, at one and the same time a movement towards `feminization' and reaction to feminism.

There is an added difficulty in gender determination which can be discerned in the debate on which approach should be adopted, whether the textual or the contextual, or both. At first a neat opposition was outlined between those critics who considered the spectator only in relation to the text, discarding the deterministic view of her/him as a mechanical receiver and decoder of

preconstituted messages, and those who insisted that to consider the viewer as only constituted in signification meant to ignore that the subject exists also outside the text (for a very useful summary of these positions, see Kuhn 1984, p. 23 onwards) (6).

A vicious circle at this point has emerged, and the very interesting attempts to bridge text and context made by Winship, Brunsdon and Kuhn have only partially solved the problem. After quoting such different sources as the IBA annual handbook, Winship, Modleski and Dyer, Brunsdon concludes:

"...Crossroads textually implies a feminine viewer to the extent that its textual discontinuities require a viewer competent within the ideological and moral frameworks, the rules of romance, marriage and family life to make sense of it." (Brunsdon 1981, p. 37)

The social subject in order to construct meanings still needs social skills. The feminine character of the genre comes from the specific kind of feminine competence that is required. The circle is an endless one: soaps and melodrama inscribe femininity in their address; women as such are already formed for these representations and at the same time are formed by them. Where has their active role ended?

5. The fe/male narrative

In all this uncertainty of definition and although it is clear that there are no pure mono-gendered narratives, the labels of male and female still hold on as meaningful. I have already shown above how Hill Street Blues, though stretching and altering some of the generic features, has done so while fundamentally confirming their male character. Soap opera in particular, in spite of all the changes and appropriations, goes on being considered a female genre, even in the case of Dallas and Dynasty, Coronation Street and Eastenders:

"...in a society whose representations of itself are governed by the

masculine, these genres (soap opera and film melodrama) at least raise the possibility of female desire and female point of view." (Kuhn 1984, p.28)

The same opinion has been expressed by Cook, Geraghty and Modleski, sometime stressing intuition and emotivity (Cook), or tolerance and passivity (the interpellation of women as mothers as observed by Modleski). Even those critics that have a few doubts on prime time soap like Ang and Buckmann, on the whole do not deny a female specificity in soap opera.

On the other hand, male critics give increasing attention to the problems of gender in general, and in particular to the male specificity of certain shows and series (see for instance D. Widgery on A-Team). There has also been work done by women on gender in genres other than soap opera Gillian Skirrow on Widows and Sandy Flitterman on Magnum, to recall two crucial studies of this kind.

There are elements that seem to characterize the female narrative in a way that goes beyond the single narrative, and the single element of interpellation, whether it could be cultural or individual. The first noticeable feature is that the narrative of soap is constructed according to a stable, horizontal, non-progressive logic. The circularity is stressed by the open format, by what I would call the non-necessity of closure, by the lack of distancing elements, of authorial markers (7). The absence of preferred points of view is another feature of this kind of narrative, the only focus being perhaps a physical fascination tied to the body of a woman.

In spite of the myriads of stories crossing and overlapping, the afternoon soap and the telenovelas produce a still and claustrophobic visuality: a prevalence of inner spaces, mostly one room (8), and endless close-ups of two beautiful faces tied by the romanticism of the colour. Two people united in embrace/copulation/opposition/confrontation/confession/gossip constitute the basic syntagm in the simplified syntax of day-time soap. The characters do not

pose any claim to continuity, whether temporal, spatial, psychological or even physiognomical (9).

The degree of abstraction is extremely thanks also to the undifferentiated sense of space and time. Time structures have no reference to our civilized notion of regular, logical progression; there may be sudden gaps - the cuts between one shot and another especially in telenovelas are not syntactically marked by any sort of stop, they are sudden and unexpected - within a temporal rhythm that is normally dilated and diluted to an unbelievable degree; power, the other great determinant beyond love and have, follows universal rules irrespective of historical specificity (10). The degree of formal and structural coherence regulating these representations and tales of love and hate, of victory and defeat is striking. It is all unified and glossed over by the same soft pink that touches the unblemished peach cheeks of the beautiful heroine, whether it is Sloane in Capitol or Nola in The Guiding Light, occasionally interrupted by a shadow of dark amber on the face of the beautiful Sonia Braga or of Veronica Castro, the telenovelas stars.

In Italy the early afternoon slot is a very good instance of this, with its sequences of day time soap operas or telenovelas, thus distributed: one soap opera within Rai (Rai 2, Capitol); a succession of four on Channel 5, the main private network (The Guiding Light, All My Children, The Ways of the World, Alice). Other private networks are devoted mainly to telenovelas, Marina, Aqua Viva, Dancin' Days, among others (11).

The case is different for the British soap opera that because of the time slot and above all because of its peculiar place within the genre cannot be likened to the feminine enclave I have just described. It would not be pertinent to mention it here except to indicate that the 7.30-8.30 slot offers a sort of unified `structure of feeling'. In spite of its `documentary' style of

representation, often inspired by the romantic ichnography of the North and of the urban working class, with its slang, whether Northerner or Cockney, with its alternation of houses, pubs, cafes, shops, it still offers the image of a world dominated by everyday events, by gossip, by the ties of family, friends, neighbourhood.

6. The feminine continuum

It is the rewriting of this textual specificity, that is the most crucial element in the definition of femininity. The intimacy and closeness is defined also by a particular contextual area, takes its sense by an atmosphere which is essential part of a feminine way of viewing.

Gender determinations should not be referred to the letter of the text but to an extended and complex process, a kind of macrotext, where reality and fiction are part of a continuum, `the feminine continuum' (A. Rich) in the case of women's narratives: the crowd of wives (from the Hollywood ones to the less glamorous ones of Northern working class England or of the American middle west), of single or married bartenders, of scheming or innocent mistresses, of `spinsters', of powerful business free women (who can also be black); and moving to a predominantly male genre of homely or ruthless women detectives, single, marries or in a couple (such as Pepper Anderson, the Angels, Juliet Bravo or Jean Darblay, Inspector Maggie Forbes, Cagney and Lacey, and Foxfire) to which we can oppose the women gangsters of the British series Widows.

A crowd that inhabits the imaginary of women, as dream and fiction, but also as part of reality (in comparison, confrontation, identification or therapy), as a bodily extension on the domestic screen of needs and desires.

The space of everyday life becomes the site of the textual performance: the narrative linking reality and fiction, inside and outside, conscious and subconscious.

7. In another country...

"...but that was in another country,

And besides, the wench is dead".

(T.S. Eliot, after Marlowe)

The Italian RAI has recently entered the era of producing soap opera, without realizing or noticing it, by broadcasting Matilde, a serial radio drama ironically called "originale radio-fonico". This is the name RAI uses for all those narratives that it produces for television or radio, which still represent a minority of the programmes broadcast in most countries (12). The irony is in the use of the work original, recalling the aura of unicity of the great work of art, precisely when it is part of the universe of infinite reproducibility.

Every morning, for 15 minutes around 9 o'clock, nearly a million of Italian women have switched on the story of a woman in her late forties, of her marriage breaking up, of her difficult relationship with her beautiful model daughter, of her strenuous fight to protect her family from the wicked plots contrived by the most blatant villain ever (apart from J.R.), of her trying to go back to her youthful `true love', a Northern Italian count... We could believe we are back in the US in the thirties, back with the first examples of 15 minute soaps. Instead it is Italy in the 80's producing its first true serial narrative while at the same time there is a busy research for the formula of a truly national television soap (13). But we are not in the thirties, soap opera has been updated. Matilde is a woman who is finding herself, who moves from being a wife and a mother to emancipation and liberation. When she is finally on her own, she discovers that she must first construct herself as an autonomous whole being, she must be for herself before she is with somebody else. And though of course it is clear that it is the soap opera convention at work here, i.e. the narrative is never closed so it can always start again, it also proves that the convention can

be a progressive one. The open structure allows a woman in her late forties to start again from scratch, a possibility that is scarcely ever accepted in real life, even less as a possible imaginary signifier (14).

It also shows that soap opera can change, that the conventions can change, Brookside and Eastenders are a good example of this (Sheila Grant's recent drive to independence from a good husband, so much more surprising as her husband is loved both by her and by the audience; the opposition wife-mistress explored, however tentatively, in a new way in the triangle Den-Angie-Jan, though in this case the charge was finally in favour of a different way of dealing with the adulterous husband, who all of a sudden was given plausible motives, convincing articulation, and a good sensibility in dealing with such a worn-out situation. In fact the greatest changes in this last serial are in favour of men and young kids; they still prove that soap opera changes and above all they prove that the connection to gender has now become a conscious one, even if only to provoke a defensive attitude.

More outward changes have been happening in the crime series: the distinctive character of the genre being very different from that of soap, tied as it was to a documentaristic style, to the very precise contemporaneity of an urban milieu, with constant references to the filmic inheritance (the black and white is often there, in spite of the colour), and to its dominant male ichnography. The emphasis is more on action, on the outside, on the relationship between men and the external world though there has always been some attention on interpersonal relations, especially on the element of male camaraderie, that has recently been accentuated as we have already, said.

Within this convention the introduction of women detectives is a break: beginning with dependent women still protected by the boss or by the male colleague (whether in the office or by phone, I am referring here to Pepper

Anderson and to Charlie's Angels) by whom they are invariably save at the end; a first interesting example came from The Avengers) to extremely autonomous women, often critical of the surrounding male milieu and very suspicious of authority or preoccupied with the difficulties of being `in charge' in a man's world. I am thinking here of Juliet Bravo and The Gentle Touch above all, but also of Cagney and Lacey.

Though the systemic structures of the genres are unchanged (the symmetrical opposition between legality and criminality, between social order and chaos, between conservative and aversive forces) there are shifts and slight changes in perspective: ambiguities, uncertainties, disorienting conflicts of loyalties that sometime come close to subverting the rationale of the genre.

The black and white atmosphere is substituted by a `chiaroscuro', the final triumph of justice is more often accompanied by an acid smile, due to the unavoidable frustration of being a woman. Inspector Forbes discovers that `the gentle touch' is not always possible, and that a policewoman has no private choices. The conflict between the public and the private becomes a more dominant theme of the series and the representation of the private more frequent than it had ever been before: Juliet Bravo is often seen at home with a husband assuming what is normally a woman's role; Lacey talking in bed with her husband after the working day (paralleled by the set scene between Joyce and Furillo closing each programme of HSB). But it is in the conflict with the male environment that the major feature lies. Others are an accentuation of seriousness, moralism and dedication to work (that is also an accentuation of the law and order convention), with the women having the function of super-egos in relation to their male colleagues. The ichnography of the series changes: there is more stress on the inside shot, on dialogue, on close-ups, less insistence on action and on violence although these are far from being absent.

This last discourse seem to propose the possibility and potentiality of female genres as progressive, in opposition to those that 'wallow' in femininity. Once more there is the difference between femininity and femaleness. The division of my discourse seems to be arranged respectively around soap and crime, the former retaining the structure of femininity in itself and the other acquiring the charge of a femininity for itself. This means, for example, that there has not yet appeared the feminine thriller (a thriller without solutions), despite the fact that the genre is founded on the post-ponement of solution and on ambiguous closures.

When we place the two modes in a new viewing context (15), the resulting collage, the casual superimposition, causes these boundaries and others to fall. In a new seriality we may choose to watch alternatively Sentieri and Capitol, or two telenovelas, but we may also choose to alternate and circulate together, on the screen and in our imaginary, two different genres: in that case the suspended circular narrativity of soap opera will invade the thriller, and the enigma will more openly enter the claustrophobic rooms of soaps. Who knows then what is going to happen to genres, and even to gendered narratives?

A temporary conclusion

Are women for ever closed in their own circular expressivity that never goes beyond, never follows a linear progressive logic? Are they forever locked in narrativity? Is their only consolation that offered by the male post-modern seers, that she is taking the other half of humanity alongside with her, into the blackhole of the simulacrum?

In spite of the gloominess of the intellectual priesthoods, I would like to end on a different note of consolation for us. While the men capitalize on us in philosophy or in new sophisticated constructions of the masculine in soap opera, we can remind ourselves that in our black hole there is laughter as well,

richness and multiplicity, in our narrativity there is 'passion, danger, desire' (Nona Hendryx).

This discourse has been left necessarily open. As a temporary closure I would like to recall a few images: two women embracing like two lovers and the close-up shot of their hair intermingling (mother and daughter in Dancin' Days finding one another after a separation of many years); one policewoman massaging another policewoman's feet giving comfort and solidarity (Cagney and Lacey); a feminine body in the ceremony of dressing, slowly putting on shoes, blouse, skirt that only in the end become part of a uniform (in the titles of Juliet Bravo); the changing fascinating postures of the body of four women in relation to one another, as they slowly learn to perform male roles through their being women together (for the spectator the fascination lies in their overturning the roles and rules of a genre - and it is Widows) (16). Apart from the many problems those images open up (the importance of the body as a powerful signifier in these fictions, the quality of pleasure and its differentiations between men and women...), they signal icons of pleasure in female narratives that are the spur to the continuation of a discourse.